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THE MOVEMENT IN OREGON FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PACIFIC COAST REPUBLIC

By DOROTHY HULL.

To fully understand the political tendencies of the West it is necessary to understand the Western spirit, for political platforms are but a more or less clear reflection of the spirit which animates those who frame them.

The West has always been the home of democracy. The Western movement in the United States from its first inception was a democratic movement. The fur traders who blazed the trail to the West, and the ranchers and farmers who followed in their wake forging the broader path for civilization were not aristocrats, but the common people—rugged, self-reliant, and ambitious. They pushed to the West, drawn by the lure of adventure, seeking cheap lands, and a chance to work out their political and social ideas free from the aristocratic organization of the East. Hence in the West democracy, social and political, became the dominant force.

The life of the pioneer was rough; social amenities were few, but a man's valuation was based on his personal worth and ability, and not on his wealth or ancestry. The problems confronting the pioneer were new and difficult, and through the effort required for their solution the minds of even the

older men experienced rejuvenation. With all his faults the pioneer must be admired for his idealism and his optimism.

The early isolation of the West, and the completeness of its geographical separation from the political center of the nation fostered an intense feeling of local independence. It was not surprising then that in times of great public danger when vital sectional interests were believed to be at stake this spirit of local independence should find expression in the doctrines of popular sovereignty, states-rights, nullification, and even secession.

So it was that before 1795 the people of the Trans-Allegheny West threatened the establishment of an independent republic when it appeared that a selfish and short-sighted Congress was on the point of bartering away for ephemeral commercial advantages the right of a free navigation of the Mississippi River, on which the very existence of the western frontiersman depended. So it was that during the critical period of our history from 1850 to 1865 when the forces making for the destruction of the American Union were gathering impetus for their most dangerous attack on the integrity of the national government, and when the Pacific Railroad had not yet bound the West to the East with bands of shining steel there developed on the Pacific Coast a movement for the establishment of a Pacific Coast Republic. While it is true that the movement was supported by but a minority of the people of the Pacific Coast, the fact of its inception by political leaders of the West is significant.

While the first cause of the movement may be considered the spirit of the West, its immediate occasion was the conflict of local and national interests which became especially marked after 1855. To understand this it is necessary to present in greater detail the federal relations of the Western States and Territories.

The Movement in Oregon for the Establishment of a Pacific Coast Republic. (1855-1861.)

On June 15, 1846, the treaty with Great Britain was signed which secured to the United States the territory of Oregon lying south of the forty-ninth parallel of latitude. The Oregon question was thus settled, and it was supposed that the American government would at once proceed to organize a government for the newly acquired territory. It was not, however, until August 14, 1848, that the bill providing for the organization of Oregon as a territory became law. This unexpected delay, caused by the opposition of the pro-slavery leaders in Congress to the clause in the Oregon Provisional Government declaring that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, should ever be permitted in the territory, was peculiarly galling to the citizens of Oregon, who felt that although their efforts had been largely responsible for the acquisition of this valuable territory by the United States government, that government was now refusing them necessary assistance and protection. ¹Nevertheless all bitter feelings were forgotten in the general rejoicing at the news of the passage of the Territorial Bill in 1848.

March 3, 1849, the territorial government was put into operation by a Democratic governor (General Joseph Lane) appointed by President Polk. The governor entered upon his duties with energy and enthusiasm, and the machinery of government was soon running smoothly.²

In Oregon at this time the political lines of demarcation were not those laid down by the great national parties; such parties as existed were based on purely local issues.

Before the territorial organization the people of Oregon had had little reason to be interested in the national disputes of Whig and Democrat, and the Oregon settler, though perhaps a violent partisan before his immigration to the far west, after that immigration soon came to think little of his former party alignment, and to concentrate his attention on local affairs.³

¹ Schafer, *History of the Pacific North-West*, pp. 216-217.

² Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 1, 780.

³ Woodward, *Rise and Early History of Political Parties in Oregon*, in Oregon Historical Society, *The Quarterly*, XII, pp. 36-37.

National interests, however, were not dead, but merely dormant, and the organization of Oregon as a territory led to an awakening which, though gradual, was none the less complete. The position of the people in relation to the national government practically forced them to take a definite stand with regard to national politics.

Unwelcome evidence of the dependence of the people of Oregon on the political complexion of the national government soon appeared. The election of 1848 placed the patronage of the government in the control of the Whig Party, and the incoming government was not slow in bestowing all available positions on office-hungry Whigs. Oregon soon felt the weight of this policy. The Democratic officials who had already won the confidence and respect of the people were replaced by Whigs. A period of bitter political strife followed this change.

Politically, Oregon in 1850, was in a transition state. The Democrats were undoubtedly the strongest party numerically, but they, as well as the other parties, lacked organization. It was impossible that such an anomalous condition of affairs should continue long. It was evident that both local and national interests demanded the perfecting of party machinery,¹ and the Democrats, spurred to additional effort because of their hatred of Whig domination, went to work to perfect a party organization for the territory.

The Whigs, though at first radically opposed to party organization, learned a valuable lesson from their decisive defeat in the election of 1852 (territorial), and the organization of the party followed without undue delay. But even after organization the Whigs were not strong enough numerically to compete with the Democrats, nor were their political tactics equally as astute as those of the chief rival party.

In the Democratic Party itself leadership soon passed into the hands of a few men who came to be popularly denominated "The Salem Clique." This group was in turn dominated by

¹ *Statesman*, June 13, 1851; February 24, 1852.

the commanding personality of Asahel Bush, the editor of the *Statesman*.¹

This Salem Clique gave to Oregon an arrogant and narrowly partisan rule. Rebellion in the ranks was not tolerated, and erring members were ruthlessly read out of the party. These domineering Democratic leaders also soon found it difficult to submit to the superior power of the national government.

Their proud necks chafed under the yoke imposed by Eastern officials appointed by an unsympathetic Congress. This feeling was particularly strong during the Whig administration of President Taylor, and loud were the complaints and many the protests launched against the custom of filling Oregon offices with foreign appointees. The territorial delegate in Congress² was requested to suggest that it would be well if the people of Oregon were granted the power of electing all their territorial officers.³ The suggestion, needless to say, was unheeded. In the meantime a violent and bitter struggle was in progress in the territory between the Whig Officials and the Democratic Legislature. The tension between the two parties soon became almost unbearable. Two possible remedies appear to have suggested themselves to the Democratic leaders—statehood and independence. A movement for statehood was actually set on foot in 1851, and also in that year appeared the first accusation that the leaders of the Oregon Democracy designed at no distant day to throw off their allegiance to the United States government and attempt to set up an independent republic.⁴ If the danger existed, as seems probable, it passed away with the success of the Democrats in the presidential election of 1852.

In 1854 "the most momentous measure that passed Congress from the day the Senators and Representatives first met until

¹ Woodward, in *The Quarterly*, v. XII.

² Joseph Lane. He was elected delegate in 1851, and held that position by successive re-elections until 1859, when on Oregon's admission to the Union, he took his place as U. S. Senator from that state.

³ Letter, Humphrey to Lane, January, 1852.

⁴ Quoted in *Oregonian*, July 28, 1851.

outbreak of the Civil War" was introduced in that body—the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.¹

The storm raised by the passage of the bill was never to die away until slavery itself should be crushed. As Charles Sumner said in speaking of the act: "To every man in the land it says with clear, penetrating voice 'Are you for freedom, or are you for slavery?'" Not only did the Free-Soilers and many of the Whigs denounce the Act, but many members of the Democratic Party refused to follow their leaders in supporting it. In a document entitled the "Appeal of the Independent Democrats" the bill was stigmatized as "A gross violation of a sacred pledge (the Missouri Compromise); as a criminal betrayal of precious rights; as part and parcel of an atrocious plot to exclude from a vast unoccupied region immigrants from the Old World, and free laborers from our own states, and to convert it into a dreary region of despotism peopled by masters and slaves."² The great Democratic Party was nearing the rocks on which it was finally to founder.

The doctrine of Popular Sovereignty enunciated by the Kansas-Nebraska Act was one that from its very nature appealed to the people of Oregon, with their virile Western confidence in the ability of the people of a locality to manage their own affairs, and yet in the beginning there seems to have been little unanimity of opinion with regard to the bill.

Despite the dominance of the Democratic Party there were in Oregon great numbers of thinking people who opposed the farther extension of slave territory, and viewed with alarm the aggressive attitude of the Southern Democrats who were dictating the policies of the national Democratic Party.³ In 1855 the first convention of Free-Soilers was held in Oregon, and the movement inaugurated which led to the formation of the Republican Party of Oregon. There appeared, too, a visible defection in the Democratic ranks, though this was due to local rather than to national disputes.

¹ Printed in *American History Leaflets*, No. 17.

² Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, I, 490.

³ Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, II, 358.

It was during these troublous times that the rumor of a plan to establish a Pacific Republic—a plan inaugurated by some of the Democratic leaders—again became persistent. In July, 1855, an editorial headed "Our Future," appeared in the *Standard* (Democratic) suggesting the idea of the formation of an independent nation west of the Rockies as being in harmony with the designs of an all-wise Providence, by whom this natural boundary had been laid down.¹

The leader ran, in brief: "In a new country there are no old associations, no stereotyped habits which filter in an accustomed routine our actions and our thoughts, but the customs which we were wont to have in our homes have given away to those which are formed by our new associations. Yes, it is indeed too true that we must look for new and energetic governments in recently settled countries. The British colonies of North America passed through a Revolution, and reared for themselves the proudest republic on the face of the earth.

"The French nation alike overturned the dynasty of Louis Philippe and established a republic also. . . . With these facts before us the future of our country demands attention. What will be the results of these causes? Can it be possible that within a few years the Pacific Coast will ask, and can secure an independent government?

"Would it be policy for them to do so? And if it would, what will be the effect of our petition to the United States Congress? Is the recently avowed doctrine of Territorial Sovereignty broad enough so that it will permit us freely to say whether we will come into the Union, or whether we will remain without, and become separate from it? If nature ever marked out the division of countries, it has done so in North America. The vast chain of the Rocky Mountains presents an unmistakable boundary, and we have reason to believe that these boundaries, laid down by an over-ruling Providence, ought to be more strictly regarded. . . . Should we secure anything to our advantage by coming into the Union which

¹ *Standard*, Portland, Oregon Territory, July, 1855. Alonzo Leland, editor.

we could not have by and of ourselves? Let us think before we act. The growing disparity of habits between us and the Atlantic States, and the pecuniary advantages or disadvantages of a separation from the states are not the only questions which ought to be considered. Is it policy for us to join a government, the different sections of which are even now antipodal on a most exciting question, and which are cultivating a spirit of disunion by their altercations?

"Do we wish to embroil ourselves in the agitation of a question which might be totally foreign to us? This agitation may cease, and in the name of heaven we hope it may—but present aspects are most cheerless. Looking at this question coolly and dispassionately, that is, the policy of uniting ourselves to a government already shaken by civil feuds and sectional dissensions, and which we should enter into by an entrance into the Union, and which we could avoid by refusing to bind ourselves by any closer ties,—we are compelled to ask seriously, what is our duty in this respect to the present and future of Oregon. These questions may be deemed visionary by fogysm,—so was that of the separation of the United States even after Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill had been wet with crimson dew, yes, and until after the Continental Congress had assembled at Philadelphia."

Carefully laying the burden on the shoulders of an overruling Providence, Oregon's Democratic leaders, with these facile arguments, tentatively broached the subject of the Pacific Coast Republic.

The leaders of opposing political complexion were not slow to take up the challenge. The *Oregonian* (Whig) was particularly bitter in its denunciation of these Revolutionary ideas. An editorial headed, "Revolutionary Filibustering in a new direction," ran as follows:¹

"Four years ago we repeatedly told the people of Oregon that the leaders of the self-styled Democratic Party designed at no distant day to throw off their allegiance to the United

¹ *Oregonian*, July 28, 1855. Thomas J. Dryer, editor.

States government. . . . We were led to this belief then from certain unmistakable evidences apparent in every act of those who then controlled, and now govern the Democratic Party of Oregon. The recklessness of their conduct, the utter disregard of law, order, or precedent, was then a subject of alarm, and has continued to increase to this hour. Whatever may be said of those who are constantly prating about their love of country, their devotion to the interests of the American Republic, . . . the facts are upon record that these men have been constantly laying their plans for a revolutionary movement, as the sequel will show. Although the party in power in this territory have had everything in their hands for the last three years, and although the leaders have been able, under their hypocritical cry of Democracy, to create, deceive, and gull the majority to sustain their measures, and to elevate an unprincipled set of demagogues to office and power; although their pensioned newspapers and party hacks have denounced for years the great fundamental principles of Americanism, yet we are not prepared to see them at this early hour throw off the mask, and declare in favor of a Revolution, and a separate government here, but nevertheless they have done so. . . . It will be remembered that upon two occasions this same party have endeavored to fasten a state government upon the people. These same men have always been the warmest advocates of a state government. The people have as often pronounced against their favorite measure. Now, in view of a strong probability, reduced almost to a certainty, of a radical change in the administration of the general government these men and their party come out in favor of a separation from the United States and the formation of a new government. Men, and particularly unprincipled men, never act without a motive. These filibusterers have a motive in view which will not fail to present itself to the mind. Their object is apparent. The time, place and occasion which has called forth this first published evidence of disaffection, will not fail to convince the honest mind of every American in the land.

Here you see a party which proclaims loud and long that Americans shall not rule America, proposing a disruption. They are endeavoring to create disaffection, anarchy, confusion, and discord among the people—urging to rebellion—a revolution against their country. What for? The object is plain to those who know and can appreciate the character and aims of the party calling itself the Democratic Party. Are the people of Oregon prepared for this movement on the party chess-board? They will, of course, indorse it, and push on the cause of disunion! We know not a few who will not take passage, no matter who may attempt to lash or goad them into this infamous measure.”

In September of the same year the Statesman had some farther information to give concerning the Revolutionary scheme.¹ A letter from an anonymous correspondent in San Francisco, reprinted from an exchange, set forth details of the plan:

“I lay before you, in advance of all publicity, a scheme which is now advancing under profound secrecy among a good number of our most respectable and influential citizens. I have no time to comment, but give you the plan, as it has been revealed to me, without any injunction of concealment. A new Republic is to be formed, consisting at first of ten states, three to be formed within the present limits of the State of California, three in Oregon Territory, two in Washington Territory, and two from western portions of Utah and New Mexico. The basis is to be a confederated government similar to yours on the Atlantic Side. The great Pacific Railroad is to be abandoned, and every obstacle thrown in the way of its construction, while the argument at the hustings is to be made to the people that the government at Washington has refused the road to the people of the Pacific. The question of slavery is to be adjured and disclaimed until the plan is so far executed that there can be no retraction, after which the southern four or five states will adopt slavery. The first convention is to be imposing in numbers, and especially in the distinguished talent

of its members. You need no information as to the number of ex-Senators, ex-Congressmen, ex-Governors, and ex-Judges who swarm in our midst, panting for one more good old-fashioned political chase. The President, Senate, Representatives, and Cabinet Ministry are all to be chosen by direct vote of the people. The naturalization laws are to be fixed on a severe basis. The act of independence is to be simultaneous with a well-planned and decisive seizure of the United States Reserves, with whatever of movables or livestock they may contain. The Sandwich Islands are to be guaranteed their independence and the United States are to be appealed to in a tone of friendly good-bye. Here you perceive an opening for all the prominent politicians, a field for the military and naval aspirants, a call for powder mills, and ordnance foundries. You may also guess how readily such a severance will be graciously received by England, France and Spain.

"I leave the subject with you without comment. Visionary as it may seem, it is not a fancy sketch; fail it may, but it is now a purpose of deep interest with the parties concerned. The first public movement will be either a society or a convention for the purpose of forming a new party to be called the Pacific Railroad Party, to draw off a majority of citizens from all old party alliances. Through this medium the Washington government is to be proscribed, and proved to be practically inadequate to our necessities. It is to be shown that we send our gold away, and receive no government protection in return, and that as we now virtually govern ourselves we might as well have the credit of it abroad. The conspirators will be startled when they see this letter in your columns, and will begin to heave the lead to find out their soundings."

If such a plan as this outlined by the unknown correspondent existed, and if it had been formulated for the reasons suggested by the Oregonian, the failure of that paper's predictions as to the presidential election of 1856, and the election of Buchanan was probably more responsible for the failure of the leaders to consummate the plan for a Pacific Coast Re-

public at this particular time, than was the untimely exposure of the plot by the press.

Although Democracy had been triumphant in 1856, it was soon evident that the breach in the ranks of the party was growing wider and wider. The Civil War in Kansas had served to swell the numbers of the Anti-Nebraska men in Oregon, as in all the northern states. Republican organization in Oregon proceeded apace.¹ The Kansas strife also reversed the stand taken by the majority of Oregonians on the statehood question, and in the election of 1857 the vote for statehood was carried by a majority of 5938.² The change in sentiment was due to the dread instilled in the hearts of the people lest scenes might in the future be enacted in Oregon corresponding to those in "Bleeding Kansas." The securing of statehood as soon as possible seemed the best method of prevention.

The question of statehood having been once decided upon, the main issue was whether Oregon should be slave or free. This was a question on which the Democratic Party as a Party dreaded to express itself, as a dissension was sure to follow. In order to avoid this shoal the Democratic Party passed a resolution; "That each member of the Democratic Party in Oregon may freely speak and act according to his individual convictions of right and policy upon the question of slavery in Oregon without in any manner impairing his standing in the Democratic Party on that account—provided that nothing in these resolutions shall be construed in toleration of black republicanism, abolition, or any other factor or organization arrayed in opposition to the Democratic Party."

Many prominent democratic leaders in Oregon took the pro-slavery side, and three out of five democratic papers were rabid advocates of slavery. Hence, although two-thirds of the Democratic Party were probably in favor of a free state constitution, there seemed imminent danger that slavery would be fastened on Oregon.³

¹ Woodward, in *The Quarterly*, XII, 130.

² Woodward, in *The Quarterly*, XII, 135.

³ *Argus*, Sept. 5, 1857.

The Constitutional Convention which assembled at Salem on August 17, 1857, determined to present the questions of slavery and of the admission of free negroes into the state as separate issues to be decided by the people when the Constitution should be submitted to them. Thus was their favorite doctrine of Popular Sovereignty nobly vindicated.

The constitution was adopted by the people of Oregon by a decisive majority.¹ Only one-fourth of the voters supported slavery, but free negroes were refused admission into the state.

In the month following that decision of the people the Democrats were confronted by the "two-edged sword" of the Dred Scott decision. An expression of opinion could not be avoided, and yet was certain to cause strife. In the regular session of the legislature December 17, 1857, a resolution was introduced: ". . . whereas slavery is tolerated by the Constitution of the United States, therefore Resolved—that the chair appoint a committee of three to report what legislation is necessary to protect the rights of persons holding slaves in this territory."

Whether, as was claimed,² the resolution was introduced in order to cause dissension in the Democratic ranks,³ that was the result. The vote on the resolution was indefinitely postponed, but the dissension that it bred could not be quelled.

Bush, the local leader of the Oregon Democracy, in the Statesman of December 8, 1857, endeavored to harmonize the Dred Scott decision with the doctrine of popular sovereignty. "It is," he said, "the very gist of the Kansas-Nebraska principle that the people are called upon when they form a state government to act upon the subject of slavery." As to the right of a citizen to have his property protected under the constitution he showed that the Constitution recognizes and protects as property within the states whatever the state laws determine to be property. In this discussion, however, he classed state governments, and people moving in the formation of state

¹ 7195 to 3215.

² *Oregonian*, Dec. 26, 1857.

³ The sponsor was Wm. Allen, a National Democrat.

governments together, and made no reference to popular sovereignty in the territories in general.

The different parties met in conventions early in 1858 to nominate state officials, in order that the state government might be ready to go into immediate operation when Oregon should be admitted to the Union. The regular Democratic convention, meeting in March, endorsed both the Kansas-Nebraska doctrine and the Dred Scott decision, in spite of the fact that Douglas, the author of the doctrine of popular sovereignty had broken with the administration over the Dred Scott decision. The platform warmly endorsed Buchanan, however, so it may be understood that Douglas was to be abandoned. The National Democrats, in a separate convention, though endorsing President Buchanan, held to the right of the people of the territories to frame and adopt their constitutions and all local laws for their own government.¹ Thus they appeared to support Douglas rather than Buchanan. The Republican State convention denounced the Dred Scott decision,² while the Whigs showed a disposition to stand with the national Democrats.³

The party lines on the question were by no means clearly drawn. Bush, though accepting nomination at the hands of the regular Democratic convention, undoubtedly preferred Douglas, but he refrained during the campaign from expressing this preference.⁴

On the other hand Joseph Lane, the territorial delegate, and hence the national representative of the regular Democratic machine, who had defended squatter sovereignty from the time of its inception, now as ably defended the Dred Scott decision.

In the ensuing Oregon election the regular Democratic Party, in spite of dissensions, was in the main successful, although in many parts of the territory the opposition (Whigs, Republicans, and National Democrats, who frequently acted together at the

¹ *Statesman*, March 23, 1858.

² *Oregonian*, April 10, 1858.

³ *Quarterly*, XII, 231.

⁴ *Quarterly*, XII, 234.

polls), showed a formidable strength. Their most conspicuous need was organization.

In July, 1858, the newly elected state legislature proceeded to elect Senators, in order that everything might be prepared for statehood. Both National Democrats and Regulars united in supporting Lane, and he and Delazon Smith, a man of similar political principles, were elected to represent the new state-to-be in the Senate.

In the meantime, the Statehood Bill was hanging fire in Congress. Before this special session of the state legislature, the bill for the admission of Oregon had passed the Senate. At the time of General Lane's election to the Senate, letters had been received from him and published in Oregon declaring that the Statehood Bill would pass the House, as there were no obstacles whatever in the way of its passage.¹ He appears, however, to have made no effort to secure its passage,² and Congress adjourned without having granted Oregon the desired boon.

Naturally suspicion was not slow to arise in the breasts of those leaders of the Oregon Democracy who were already inclined to distrust Lane's honesty and sincerity of purpose. A cry of rage went up from Oregon when it was known that the Statehood Bill had failed of passage. In the *Statesman*, Bush gave vent to the popular outcry in a scathing editorial denouncing Lane, whom he had hitherto supported.³

The testimony that he adduced went to show that Lane was holding off the admission of the state until he could be certain of his election to the office of Senator. Later, however, a more sinister view was taken of his course, and he was accused in view of the approaching national crisis, of wishing to put Oregon into the position of a state outside the Union.

Viewing his actions in this light, very significant is the message sent by Governor Curry of Oregon, Lane's close friend, to

¹ *Statesman*, March 15, 1859.

² *Statesman*, Dec. 21, 1858.

³ *Statesman*, Dec. 21, 1858.

the territorial legislature which assembled in December, 1858.¹ After deploring the fact that Oregon had not been admitted as a state, he went on to show that the whole territorial system of the United States was unconstitutional. He said:

"It is wrong in principle. There is no provision of the Constitution which confers the right to acquire territory to be retained as territory, and governed by Congress with absolute authority. Nor, by the terms of the federal compact, can the people of the United States who choose to go out and reside upon the vacant territory of the nation be regarded as mere adventurers, without individual political rights, and be made to yield a ready obedience to whatever laws Congress may deem best for their government, and to pay implicit deference to the authority of such officers as may be sent out to rule them. No such power has ever been delegated by the sovereign people of the sovereign states to the government of the United States, and no such principle underlies the government. . . . In reference to that clause of the Constitution which gives Congress power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property of the United States, which is contended for as the source from which Congress derives the power to govern the territories, that tribunal (the Supreme Court) has clearly determined that no such power exists therein. . . . In my judgment Congress has no constitutional authority to establish governments anywhere upon the public domain or to create and ordain any species of constitution or organic law for the government of any civil community anywhere within the boundary of the United States."

Such ideas enunciated at this critical time could not but arouse distrust. Lane later advised the people to put the state government into operation without awaiting the consent of Congress, but largely owing to the influence of Bush this suggestion was not adopted.

¹ *Statesman*, Dec. 4, 1858.

At first, as has been indicated, the regular Democratic organization in Oregon had supported Buchanan, while the Nationals had appeared to veer toward Douglas. As time went on public sentiment began to change, and by the latter part of December many of those who had once been loudest in lauding Buchanan had become supporters of Douglas, and vice versa. Bush who had always secretly favored Douglas was by no means the last to openly shift his allegiance to that leader.

In the meantime, February 12, 1859, the Statehood Bill was passed by the House, and on February 14 it became law. The bill had been regarded in Congress as a party issue, and the debate over it had been long and acrimonious. The Republicans opposed the admission of Oregon ostensibly because the territory lacked the necessary population, but really because, while Kansas with a greater population had been refused admission unless she would accept a pro-slavery constitution, Oregon with less population was to be admitted with a constitution prohibiting the entrance of free negroes into the state. They justly considered the distinction unfair. Then even more influential was the fact that a closely contested presidential election was at hand, and Oregon with her democratic delegation might cast the decisive vote. At any rate, her delegation would materially increase the strength of the Democratic Party in Congress.

The ultra-southern Democrats steadfastly opposed the bill because they feared the admission of any more northern states, whether Democratic or otherwise, or possibly because they, too, desired to see Oregon a state outside the Union. Today it is freely admitted that had Oregon failed of admission before the election of 1860 she could not have been received before 1864 or 1865, and with secession doctrines so rife in Oregon what the result might have been is difficult to tell.¹

The Statehood Bill would most certainly have failed of passage had it not been that fifteen republicans, inspired by Eli Thayer of Massachusetts, revolted against the party dictum

¹ Conversation with Mr. George H. Himes.

and supported the admission of Oregon. As it was, the new state was admitted by a majority of 114 to 108.¹

The final passage of the bill did much to restore the lost prestige of Lane in Oregon, although there seems to be no good reason for giving him any credit for its passage. Rather the opposite. Reconciliation between Bush, the leader of the Regular Democrats, and Lane was impossible, but the National Democrats were ready to fly to the support of the latter. Their views were largely similar to his, and with him at their head they hoped once more to secure control of the party machinery.²

In this they were successful, and in the democratic convention of April 20, 1859, Bush was forced to see his enemies in control of the party from which he had practically read them out in earlier years: to see their tenets laid down as planks in the party platform, and their candidates nominated for office. It was a bitter blow. Bush was not, however, without means of defense, and the columns of the *Statesman* for the years 1859, 1860 and 1861 blaze with denunciations of Lane and his party.

As dissensions among the Democrats increased the Republicans were growing stronger, and straining every effort to form a party organization strong enough to defeat the Democrats at the polls. The Republican Convention which met in April, 1859, avowed the strongest devotion to the Union; announced its opposition to the further extension of slavery; but denied the right of the government to interfere with the institution in the states where it already existed. A declaration was also made in favor of popular sovereignty, which, while not a good Republican principle, would certainly strengthen their position in Oregon, as it was a doctrine on which Oregonians had been bred and nurtured, and to which they clung, whether Democrats or Republicans. The Republicans, then, condemned the Dred Scott decision, but upheld popular sovereignty: the radical Democrats, who under the leadership of Lane had gained con-

¹ Franklin P. Rice, Eli Thayer and the admission of Oregon in *Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary of the admission of Oregon to the Union*, Feb., 1909.

² *Quarterly*, XII, 248.

trol of the party machinery, supported the Dred Scott decision, while the followers of Bush clung to the doctrine of absolute non-intervention, popular sovereignty carried to the nth degree. It can readily be seen that even thus soon the bonds uniting Oregon Republicans and Douglas Democrats were closer than those connecting the latter with the Radical Democracy.

The elections of 1859 were pregnant with meaning. The machine Democrats were successful, but their candidate for Congressman was elected by a bare majority of 16 votes, and their majorities everywhere were dangerously cut down. Undoubtedly many of the Douglas Democrats had cast their votes for Republican candidates. This was a grim presage of the end.

The time for choosing delegates to the national nominating conventions was now at hand. The Radical Democrats had secured control of the State Central Committee, from which was issued a call for a State Democratic convention to elect delegates to the National Democratic Convention which was to be held at Charleston in the ensuing year to select the presidential candidate of the party. ¹Lane hoped to so arrange the representation in the state convention as to secure his own recommendation as a candidate for the presidency. His tactics were understood by the opposition. The result was a split in the convention which resulted in the withdrawal of the representatives of eight counties. After this withdrawal, Lane, Matthew P. Deady, and Lansing Stout, were chosen as delegates and instructed to do every thing in their power to secure the nomination of Lane for either the presidency or the vice-presidency by the Charleston convention.²

This National Democratic Convention met at Charleston April 23, 1860. The story of the split in the Democratic Party which occurred there is well known. When the pro-slavery delegates withdrew at the adoption of the Douglas platform, Lane, who had not attended the convention, telegraphed the

¹ *Quarterly*, XII, 260.

² *Statesman*, Nov. 22, 1859.

Oregon delegation to withdraw with the ultras.¹ At the Seceder's convention which met in Baltimore, Breckinridge was nominated for President and Lane for Vice-President. Lane's nomination was undoubtedly due to the fact that it was understood that he would be able to swing the vote of the Pacific States. It was soon to appear that this was a vain hope.

The news of Lane's instructions to the Oregon delegation and the report of the doings of the Seceder's convention aroused a storm of indignation among the Douglas Democrats of Oregon. Speculation was rife as to the plans of the Breckinridge party, and news of their disunion plans was not slow to filter through the press. Again was revived the rumor of a projected Pacific Republic.

The *Statesman* of July 17, 1860, under the head of "The Lane and Gwin Conspiracy" said:²

"It is openly charged by Washington correspondents that Gwin (Senator from California) and Lane have entered into a conspiracy with Southern Congressmen to break up the Democratic organization as a preliminary step to breaking up the Union, out of which three republics are to be formed. The states east to be divided on the line of the free and slave states, forming two governments, and the Pacific Slope to constitute the third. But the dream of these political gamesters will not be accomplished, in their lifetime, at least. Even in the event that a secession movement should take place in the cotton states, California and Oregon when the test comes will remain true to the Union."

During the following year the Republican and Douglas-Democratic Press offered from time to time more detailed information as to the great conspiracy. It was shown³ that the Senators and Representatives from California, the Senator and Representatives from Oregon and the delegation from Washington Territory, representing altogether a little more than a million of people, had held a caucus and resolved to favor

¹ *Statesman*, July 3, 1860.

² *Statesman*, July 17, 1860.

³ *Statesman*, July 24.

disunion and the formation of three separate republics, and that the formation of a Pacific Coast Republic was broached and advocated in case of a dissolution of the Union by Senator Latham of California. In December, 1860, fairly complete details of the plan were given.¹ The Pacific Republic was to be an aristocracy after the model of the ancient republic of Venice, all the power being vested in an hereditary nobility, the chief executive being elected on a very limited suffrage. Slaves were to be procured by inviting coolies, South Sea Islanders, and negroes to immigrate to California, and then reducing them to slavery. Gwin, it appeared, favored a separate republic on the Pacific Coast because he feared that the aggressive policy of the southern leaders would be likely to involve the other states in continual difficulties. While the details of the plan might excite suspicion as the elaborations of a journalistic imagination, the truth of the main outline appears to have been fairly well substantiated.

In commenting on the plan Bush of the *Statesman* said:

"What a ridiculous figure would the Pacific Republic cut among the nations. With a population of little more than half a million scarcely able to protect ourselves from the inroads of the Indians upon our borders, hardly rich enough to sustain the expenses of our economical state governments, and dependent upon the bounty of the general government for military protection, mail facilities, and for the salaries of a large number of our public functionaries, what would be our fate were we to cast ourselves loose from the protection and assistance which we receive from it. Burdened with a host of new officers and salaries, poor, feeble, defenceless contemptible, we should become the spoil of arrogant officials at home, and be at the mercy of every petty rival abroad. Now we rejoice in the pride of our strength—the strength of a great and powerful nation. Sundered from our parent states our pitiable weakness would render us a bye-word and a reproach among

¹ *Statesman*, December 10, 1860; other references in *Argus*, Aug. 25, 1860; *Argus*, Dec. 29, 1860; *Statesman*, July 31, 1860.

neighboring nations. With Mexico upon one side, British Columbia on the other, a defenseless sea-coast in front, and a horde of hostile savages and marauding Mormons in the rear, and unable to protect ourselves on any side, we could only preserve our existence by forming an alliance with some powerful government which could afford us protection at the price of our liberty."

In September the Oregon legislature met to elect Senators to fill the place already vacated by Smith and that soon to be vacated by Lane. The report of Lane's disunion projects had by this time irreparably damaged his reputation. Alarmed at the reports of the disunion conspiracy, the Douglas Democrats and the Republicans formed what was practically a fusion party with the one object of defeating Lane and his party.¹ After a prolonged and bitter struggle the election resulted in the choosing of J. W. Nesmith, a Douglas Democrat, and Colonel E. D. Baker, a Republican, as Senators. A political Revolution of no mean importance had taken place, and Oregon's Union sentiments were vindicated.

On the sixth of November, 1860, the presidential vote was cast, and by the ninth it was known not only that Lincoln was elected, but that the Republicans had carried Oregon.

There followed shortly after the news of the secession of South Carolina, and early in 1861 of five other states. At first, in Oregon as in many other northern states was heard the cry, "Let the erring sisters depart in peace," but later a more war-like tone developed among Republicans and Douglas Democrats. The Radical Democratic press, however, warmly supported the seceders.²

Lane of course openly stood with the Secessionists. In several speeches in the United States Senate, he warmly defended the action of the seceding states, and indicated that Oregon's sympathies would be with them.³ Personal pledges

¹ Prophesied May 12, 1859, in a letter from Jesse Applegate to J. W. Nesmith.

² See issues of *Oregon Democrat* 1861.

³ Speeches of Dec. 5, 1860; Jan. 15, 1861; Mch. 2, 1861. *Cong. Globe*, 2d session, 36th Congress Pt. 1, 8, 17, Pt. II, 1343, 1349.

are said to have been given to Jefferson Davis that the Pacific Coast States would be disloyal to the Union.¹ It seems strange that such an experienced politician as Lane should have failed to read the lesson written in the election of 1860. Latham of California was the wiser, for he admitted in a speech in the Senate that California would undoubtedly remain true to the Union.² Yet there seems to have been greater danger from the disunion party in California than in Oregon.³

Although the Radical Democratic party still had a strong following in Oregon, the fact that the Republicans had carried the state in 1860 made it fairly certain that no disunion scheme could have weight in Oregon. A leading politician writing to Senator Nesmith early in 1861 said: "You will see a good deal of blowing about a Pacific Republic for this coast. It does n't amount to anything now. If the Union should go into more than two pieces then it would most likely become a fact, and rather a small one."⁴ Certainly there had been little chance of such a movement succeeding. While many people in Oregon believed in the sacred right of secession, but few were sufficiently interested to take up arms in defense of the right.

As the War went on, the various disunion papers edited in Oregon, one by one laid themselves open to prosecution and were suppressed. While in parts of the state men at first went to the elections armed, lest the pro-slavery party should attempt to re-enact the scenes of the Kansas-Nebraska strife, as they threatened to do,⁵ the sense of danger gradually passed away, and a sense of security returned.

¹ Blaine, *Twenty Years in Congress*, I, 308.

² *Congressional Globe*, 2d session, 36th Congress, Pt. I, 684.

³ See *San Francisco Weekly Bulletin* Oct. 18, 1862, for schemes of California disunionists. When the plan for a Pacific Republic was abandoned they planned the seizure of the Mexican province of Sonora, which the French also coveted. At the commencement of the war, California secessionists had formed a league of Knights of the Golden Circle, taking oath to support a Pacific Coast Republic, and had planned the seizure of the Custom House and the Mint in San Francisco, the Navy Yard at Mare Island, and the depot at Benicia. Fortunately their plans failed, because the person chosen to lead the attack upon the public buildings named refused to accept the responsibility; and before another leader could be agreed upon, Gen. Edwin V. Sumner, U. S. A., assumed command at the Presidio in San Francisco, thus relieving Col. Albert Sidney Johnston, who went into the Southern States via Mexico at once.

⁴ Deady to Nesmith, Feb. 28, 1861.

⁵ Conversation with Mr. George H. Himes.

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